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PROBLEMS OF MODERN INDUSTRY. By Sidney and Beatrice Webb.
Longmans, Green & Co., 1898. Pp. viii, 286.

To the student of the literature of Economics—or shall we say, of Socialism?—it is a great assistance to have collected in one volume a number of articles previously hidden away in many and diverse periodicals. For purposes either of education or controversy, the magazine article pays for its rapid circulation with a brief life, and every month sees it buried one deeper under the weight of successive numbers until author and publisher conspire to endow it with a second and more dignified existence. The essays in the volume before us have all appeared before, and their present form makes a very acceptable book.

Some of them, notably those signed B. W., are original studies of great interest and permanent value. The chapter entitled “The Diary of an Investigator” is a graphic picture of one side of the life of working-women, though a picture which does not convey quite the lesson which the remaining articles endeavor to enforce; and the “Jews of East London” (originally contributed to Mr. Charles Booth’s “Life and Labor of the People”) is an account of the “Chosen People” and their relation to modern history which we could wish to see expanded into a volume by itself. “Women and the Factory Acts” is an eloquent plea for the position that “in the life of the wage-earning class, absence of regulation does not mean personal freedom;” that “it is the law, in fact, which is the mother of freedom.” The position would, we think, have been a stronger one, if another had taken what is perhaps the bolder, certainly the more general, ground of claiming that no one can say *a priori* whether more law means more or less freedom, but that every proposed law must be carefully judged on its merits and on the success or failure of similar laws in similar spheres of action. This is, indeed, the line of argument to a great extent adopted in support of Factory Legislation in general; but Factory Legislation “in general” is just what no accumulation of arguments can ever justify, though very little may be needed to show the righteousness of some particular measure. Nor, indeed, is there any need to limit the possible enfranchising effect of law to the wage-earning class; there is no class in the community which does not benefit by law, just as there is no class in the community which may not be oppressed by it.

A characteristic feature of the whole book, and one which espe-

cially mars the more controversial chapters, is the tone of hostility towards certain sections of the community and of favoritism towards certain other sections. The effect of this is perhaps not quite what the authors would have wished. We have all of us read novels where the villain is so bad and the heroine so superhumanly good that our sympathies have been diverted into the wrong direction, and we have begun to suspect the author of calumniating the villain. So the effect of reading conscientiously through two hundred and seventy-nine pages (the rest is index), plentifully besprinkled with the tyranny of the employer, the greed of the wine-drinking plutocrat, and the oppression of down-trodden slaves, is to make us scent fiction and turn from the lurid coloring in search of some more impartial representation of our social life, and of the relations between the different classes composing it. But the most serious blot upon the book, and one which is likely to discredit it with all fair-minded students, is the deliberate reproduction, in the essay entitled "The Reform of the Poor Law," of figures and misinterpretations of figures which have already been subjected to a searching and annihilating criticism. Many of the so-called facts quoted in that essay originally appeared in a Fabian tract, and were exposed in a paper read before the British Association in 1892; and to offer them again in support of seriously suggested reforms without a word of explanation or justification is, to say the least of it, a grave oversight.

To an outsider, with no claim to the title of "comrade" which gives such an esoteric flavor to the last chapter, perhaps the most astonishing thing will be the glimpse given in "Socialism, True and False" of the "true inwardness" of the Socialist position. That after fourteen years of vigorous propaganda the Fabian Society should wake up suddenly to the necessity of "hard thinking" and realize how little attention they have paid to "unsettled questions of democratic administration," is a very desirable event; but surely the author must be aware that the Philosophic Radicals, to whom he compares himself and his party, did their hard thinking *before* they undertook to spread their opinions abroad, and did not wait until afterwards to begin.

We may, perhaps, sum up by saying of these essays, what indeed we might say of any work, that they are valuable just in so far as they are in real contact with facts. And after all, each reader must ultimately decide for himself how far that is the case.

HELEN BOSANQUET.

LONDON.